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Family Recipe

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Family Recipe

I imagine Emma, whose recipe we obey,
her hands sunk finger-deep
in batter spotted with yellow raisins,
sticky citron.

She would work the pale paste inside out,
fold it upon itself, again, again,
till twelve eggs disappeared,
sugar melted into the cream.

She would turn the stiff mix into slick-greased pans,
lay cherries in rings around its top,
push every other one to the bottom, leave
every other one to rest in between.

My cousin and I, together only
to spend Saturday with a great aunt,
hear Emma's recipe recited,
rehearse this ritual decades old.

We giggle when talk turns to goiters,
to toes bloated with gout,
or callers come to spark
on Sabbath afternoons.

We use the battered pans,
the spoons tarnished and misshapen,
sit atop the same stools our mothers used,
feet lapped half around the rungs.

I am called to separate the eggs,
my cousin sent to pick
dark raisins from the rest; we mix and stir
and pour Emma's formula as she did,
solemn in the creation of sweet cakes, browned,
swaddled in linen, soaked in wine.